

source :

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1992-book2/html/PPP-1992-book2-doc-pg1304.htm>

[Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush (1992-1993, Book II)] [August 5, 1992] [Pages 1304-1307] [From the U.S. Government Publishing Office www.gpo.gov]

Remarks to the Knights of Columbus Supreme Council Convention in New York City August 5, 1992 :

Thank you very, very much for that warm welcome. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Please be seated, and thank you all. May I salute Virgil Dechant, my friend of long standing, and thank him for that most generous welcome here. Your Eminence, Cardinal O'Connor, it is a great pleasure, an honor, sir, to see you again.

May I salute Cardinal Baum, Cardinal Gagnon, Bishop Daily; another old friend, Ambassador Tom Melady, who is doing a superb job for our country, representing us at the Vatican; and the clergy and ladies and gentlemen. May I salute a man who used to be--whose house made him a neighbor, Archbishop Cacciavillan, from Washington, the Nuncio there, a good man, a good friend. Nice to see you. I'm glad you're here, sir.

I have only one regret, Virgil. My timing was such that I did not hear the fitting and warm and wonderful ovation that you gave Mother Teresa yesterday. I understand it was really fantastic. A report came across my desk the other day. It stated that most people in the Western world ``felt exceedingly gloomy about the future." It said that ``institutions were decaying, well-meaning people were growing cynical." These are exact quotes. My first

thought was that's what happens when people spend too much time watching the evening news. [Laughter] I'm going to pay for that one tonight on that first 20 seconds. [Laughter] Just kidding, Dan. [Laughter] No, but what I was reading was not a report about 1992. It was a history of public attitudes in Europe in 1492. Public moods are prone to change, of course. We know that the gloom of 1492 was not to last for long. It was dispelled by the achievement of a man of humble birth, a man of vision, of courage, a man named Christopher Columbus. Now, I know that every speaker comes before you and says they identify with Columbus. But I really mean it. Think about it. The guy was faced with questions at home about whether his global efforts were worth a darn. Some critics wanted him to cut his voyage short. He even faced the threat of mutiny. [Laughter] And yet Columbus persevered and won; not a bad analogy in my view. So I know this isn't political. [Laughter] Now, I admit, Columbus also had to worry at the time about a lack of wind. I don't have that problem with Congress. [Laughter] This year, as in Columbus' time, we hear a lot of talk about change. Sure, change is natural. But maybe a better word for the United States of America is renewal because the changes we need must be based on principles that never change.

I think my parents were like yours: They brought me up to understand that our fundamental moral standards were established by Almighty God. They taught me that if you have something for yourself, you should give half to a friend. They taught me to take the blame when things go wrong and share the credit when things go right. These ideas were supported by society. **Only recently--His Eminence and I were talking about, not in this detail, but talking about this subject just a few minutes ago--only recently in America have we seen**

the rise of legal theories and practices that reject our Judeo-Christian tradition. Cardinal O'Connor eloquently describes this as an ``invasion of values." It's a deeply disturbing trend, and it is diametrically opposed to my idea of the kind of change that's good for our great country. Last month, just 12 blocks from here, there was another convention. Now, I was very lucky, I did not--and this is the honest truth--I didn't hear any of the speeches. I [[Page 1305]] was out fishing in Wyoming with Jim Baker. But I understand one of the speakers, known for his florid language, called me ``the captain of the ship of state." I'm not sure he meant it as a compliment, but believe me, as a Navy man at a Knights of Columbus convention, the term suits me just fine. [Laughter] I look at this office that you've entrusted with me as a lot of things, as more than managing the economy, more even than being Commander in Chief. I stake my claim to a simple belief: The President should set the moral tone for this Nation.

All around us, we see evidence that America's moral compass has gone awry. We seem to be moving away from the enduring idea of taking responsibility for our actions. Our city newspapers are filled with stories of drive-by shootings, the taking of human life made more horrible by the awful anonymity through which it is accomplished. Recently I read a story of a kid from a good neighborhood charged in a gun store robbery. He told the police who caught him, ``It's not like I'm a criminal. I'm on the dean's list." What is happening to America? As a nation, we face enormous challenges in education, crime, drugs. Yet each of them come back to the challenge of pointing our moral compass in the right direction. **So I believe that a central issue of this election year should be, who do you trust to renew America's moral purpose?** Who do you trust to fight for the

ideas that will help rebuild our families and restore our fundamental values? I believe, and I've tried hard on this, I believe I've earned your trust. I am committed to fighting for ideas that help repair this great Nation's moral fiber. Welfare is one example. We all know that our welfare system has literally destroyed the concept of personal responsibility, tearing families apart, with no incentives for people to work and save and improve. I want something different. I have fought for a new welfare system that says ``yes" to human potential. Today, as we speak, we are granting waivers to States so they can change welfare rules, encourage families not to fall apart, not to live apart, but to stick together. States are saying to recipients, either you get training, or you don't get a check. Some States are even going so far as to make a very tough call of saying to parents, if you can't afford another child, don't expect the taxpayer to pick up the added costs. Now, these are tough choices. These are very tough choices, but they're all intended by the States to promote responsibility.

The other side says they agree with the ideas. But if you look close, some argue that ultimately the only solution to welfare is a guaranteed Government job for every recipient. I ask, is this any way to promote responsibility? If we guarantee everyone a Government job, how can we reward initiative? Our reforms may sound tough, but not as tough as a lifetime of despondency and despair, a lifetime that strips every recipient of his or her dignity. Let's give people hope. Let's give them opportunity. Let's take a look at education. We know that to renew America, we literally must renew our schools. I happen to believe that competition can be the greatest force for change in our schools in an entire century. The other side says they agree, almost. The ``almost" is what troubles me. Remember how old Henry Ford used to tell his

customers they could have any color Model T that they wanted, so long as it was black. [Laughter] Well, the other side says their ideal is that parents could choose any school for their kids, so long as it's run by the government. If you'll excuse one blatantly political comment in which you'll have to concede has so far been a nonpartisan, almost, speech-- [laughter]--my opponent won the teachers union endorsement by saying he's ``unalterably opposed," those are his words, ``unalterably opposed" to letting Catholic parents and other private school parents have a fair share of education benefits. I believe that it's time to have the courage to fight for a different approach. Right now, if you want an alternative to public schools, you have to pay twice, first for tuition and again through taxes. **A couple weeks ago I was in Philadelphia, hosted by Cardinal Bevilacqua.** And a group of parents told me, ``We want our kids to go to Catholic school, but we just can't afford it." **So my solution is something called the ``GI bill" for kids. Like the original GI bill, my new approach offers scholarships or vouchers for students to take to any qualified school, not only public schools but Bible schools, yeshivas, Catholic parish schools.** When it comes to schools, I say let the parents choose public, private, or religious. What about promoting religion as a force for good in our society? I'm reminded of the story of a small boy who once began a prayer this way: ``God bless Mother and Daddy, my brother, my sister. And God," he said, ``do take care of yourself. If anything happens to You, we're all sunk." [Laughter] Maybe there's some doubts, but America is still the most religious nation on Earth. I want to strengthen our faith further. Again, there are wide differences. Some think it's okay to hand out condoms in schools but oppose amending our Constitution to allow our kids to put their hands together to say a prayer. I disagree. I call again on the Congress to pass a constitutional amendment restoring voluntary prayer to our classrooms. **The Senate opens its**

meeting with a prayer. The House of Representatives opens its meeting with a prayer. Nobody doubts that they both need it. [Laughter] But let's allow the faith of our fathers back into those schools.

And there's a national tragedy: More than a half a million abortions in this country every year. We know there's got to be a better way, human alternatives like adoptions and abstinence. Seven times I have ignored the polls and acted on what I believe is fundamental principle and vetoed, as Virgil very generously pointed out, abortion legislation. And I promise you again today, no matter the political price, and they tell me in this year that it's enormous, I am going to do what I think is right. I am going to stand on my conscience and let my conscience be my guide when it comes to matters of life. [Applause] Thank you very much. Here's something else that bothers me. In some places, a 13-year-old girl cannot get her ears pierced without parental permission, without bringing her mother and father along. But some believe that the same girl should be able to get an abortion without parental consent. I think most Americans believe this idea is crazy, and I'm going to fight to see that that doesn't happen. So these issues, they all come up in an election year. They'll be part of campaigns in the fall all across the country. Today I make the same appeal to you that I'll make to every voter. Look beneath the rhetoric. Take a look at the ideas to determine who has the courage to stand up for changes that are morally right for America. I'm going to take my case to the American people. And if you're looking to restore America's moral fiber, why buy synthetic when you can get real cotton? [Laughter] **But I do believe America needs a leader willing to do what's right, not merely what is politically popular at the moment.** Nowhere is it more clear in the decisions a President

must make every day to build real peace, to establish freedom and democracy, not the mere, simple absence of war. **Saint Ignatius said, "Work as though all depended upon yourself, and pray as though all depended on God." The practice of that motto conquered communism.** Ceaseless prayer and tireless work halted the cold war and spared us from the catastrophe of a third world war. Believers behind the Iron Curtain defied persecution; believers in the West defied indifference. Over four decades, our servicemen trained, our taxpayers paid \$4 trillion to keep our defenses strong. As a consequence, the Iron Curtain is no more, and our kids no longer go to bed at night worrying about that dreadful specter of nuclear war. But while the Soviet bear is no more, there are still plenty of wolves in the woods. When we faced our first big challenge after the cold war, we didn't shrink. We stood up to Saddam's aggression and expelled him from Kuwait. We protected the people of Israel and Saudi Arabia. Now we've brought age-old adversaries to the peace table for the first time. **His Holiness Pope John Paul has spent many days and nights at work and in prayer for peace in the Middle East. As long as I am President, I assure you I will do everything I can to bring about that peace that so many pray for.** And so, in conclusion, let me say this: This is the year of change, change, change. The election will all be about change because change really is the natural condition of our land. This isn't something new. I believe that now we've changed the world, we are poised and ready to change America, to make America even better. But we must keep something important in mind. Now that our moral values are victorious around the globe, we cannot and we will not abandon them at home. We didn't stand together to see courageous moral values rise in Russia only to be ignored here at home. We did not sacrifice so that personal responsibility could triumph in totalitarian regimes, only to become passe here in this

great Nation. It's time to get back to some basic American values. **So I am going to defend the principles for which you stand so firm.** We will keep our sights on what's good in America. We will keep our focus on the potential in our families and, most of all, in our young people, in our kids. We'll keep a reliable compass. We'll put our ship of state in finest sailing trim, and as this Nation has so many times before, we will sail on to shining new horizons. Thank you. May God bless you and our beloved country, the United States of America. Thank you very much. "

Note: The President spoke at 11:04 a.m. at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. **In his remarks, he referred to Virgil C. Dechant, Supreme Knight, Knights of Columbus; John Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York; William Cardinal Baum, Patrimony of the Holy See; Edouard Cardinal Gagnon, president, Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses; Thomas Daily, Bishop of Brooklyn; Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, Papal Nuncio; Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder and superior of the Missionaries of Charity; Dan Rather, CBS News; and Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua, Archbishop of Philadelphia.**